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**Rudi Matthee: The Pursuit of Pleasure**

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# INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK addresses the topic of drugs and stimulants in Iran's history as a dialogue between their status as part of material culture—as concrete, tangible consumables with a physical working—and the array of meanings Iranian's have attached to them over a period of four hundred years, in the belief that such an approach might reveal something significant about Iran—as a society at any given moment in that long period, as a society in process, and as a society interacting with the outside world.

From ancient times until the present-day Islamic Republic, psychoactive agents have influenced Iranian social, political, and economic life in ways that range from the ordinary to the surprising and remarkable. Wine, which may have originated in Iran, was the drink of choice for Iranian elites in premodern times. Its consumption does not seem to have diminished much following the Arab conquest and the introduction of Islam in the seventh century C.E. Far from always being a private affair, inebriation at times diminished military vigor and the quality of political leadership. The wine-soaked defeat Shah Isma`il suffered against the Turks in the battle of Chaldiran in 1514 illustrates this point as vividly as the fact that alcholism shortened the lives of several Safavid rulers.

The same is true for opium, which has been part of the Iranian landscape since Sasanian times and a popular drug since at least the Safavid period. Although people typically took a daily dose that was too small to render them incapable of going about their daily lives, excess did occur, and, as with wine, overindulgence among the ruling elite at times came at the expense of good governance. Most dramatically, the expansion of opium cultivation was a contributing factor to the terrible famine of 1869–72 that may have wiped out one tenth of Iran's population. Tobacco, tremendously popular almost from the moment it entered the country in the sixteenth century, three hundred years later became the centerpiece of a revolt that sparked the Constitutional Revolution, arguably the most far-reaching revolution in Iranian history to this day. Although coffee and tea can lay claim to no such fame, these beverages did not just become popular but also had a substantial part in fashioning new forms of sociability, and tea eventually triumphed as Iran's most popular beverage by far.

This book examines these various intoxicants, the ones that, in the words of a long-time foreign resident of seventeenth-century Iran, provided

Iranians with *damagh*, gave them a "kick," got them into a good mood.[1] By tracing their historical trajectory and the role they have played in Iranian society, it follows examples set by recent scholarship on narcotics and stimulants in other parts of the early modern world. The last two decades have seen a surge in attention to consumption, including the consumption of psychotropic substances, in early modern times. A fair share of the resulting scholarship has been devoted to the study of stimulants such as coffee and tea, which are no longer viewed as mere commodities in the "trade and consumer" revolutions but are now explored as emblems and symbols of religious practice, social relations, or political change. Alcoholic beverages and opiates, too, have begun to attract the attention of historians. Scholars have addressed their function in religious imagery and medical experimentation, examined their acceptance and distribution as indices of social class and status, or focused on governmental reactions to their widespread adoption, which ranged from legal prohibition to fiscal stimulation.[2]

With the exception of the original areas of cultivation, South America for tobacco, Yemen for coffee and China for tea, the non-European world has received short shrift in this recent scholarship.[3] Rudolf Gelpke's broad-ranging book on narcotics in East and West and Franz Rosenthal's more specific study on hashish in medieval Muslim society aside, drugs and stimulants, the context in which they were used and the ritual that surrounded them, have just begun to enter the consciousness of Middle East historians.[4] The ones who have taken the lead in examining this aspect of daily life in the early modern Middle East are scholars of the Ottoman Empire.[5] And coffee has received by far the most attention. The classic study on the subject, Ralph Hattox's book on the culture of its

[1]Du Mans, "`Estat de 1660," in Richard, *Raphaël du Mans*, 2:102.

[2]Recent social studies of narcotics and stimulants in the early modern period, mostly in a European context, include, in chronological order, Sandgruber, *Bittersüsse Genüsse* (1986); Daniella Ball, ed., *Kaffee im Spiegel europäischer Trinksitten* (1991); Karl Wassenberg, *Tee in Ostfriesland: Vom religiösen Wundertrank zum profanen Volksgetränk* (1991); Schivelbush, *Tastes of Paradise* (1992); Hans Gros, *Rausch und Realität: Eine Kulturgeschichte der Drogen* (1996); Thomas Hengartner et al., eds. *Genussmittel, Eine Kulturgeschichte* (1999); Courtwright, *Forces of Habit* (2001); Iain Gately, *Tobacco: A Cultural History of How an Exotic Plant Seduced Civilization* (2001); Weinberg and Bealer. *The World of Caffeine* (2001); Jessica Warner, *Craze: Gin and Debauchery in an Age of Reason* (2002). For Russia, see Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*; for China, see Dikötter et al., *Narcotic Culture*; For the Middle East, see Desmet-Grégoire and Georgeon, eds., *Cafés d'Orient revisités*.

[3]For Yemen, see Brouwer, *Cauwa ende Comptanten/Cowha and Cash*. For coffee in the Ottoman Empire, see Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses*. A recent study of tea in China is Evans, *Tea in China*.

[4]Rosenthal. *The Herb*; and Gelpke, *Vom Rausch im Orient und Okzident*.

[5]See, for example, Farooqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan*; and Quataert, ed., *Consumption Studies*.

consumption in the Ottoman Empire, has recently been joined by studies of various other, mostly trade-related, aspects of coffee's rise to prominence.[6] The history of tea, by contrast, the most popular beverage in much of the Middle East, remains largely unexamined. Remarkably, the same is true for wine. Peter Heine and, more recently, Kathryn Kueny, have addressed the important topic of alcohol in the Islamic world, but wine remains most readily associated with mystical poetry.[7] With David Fahey, we may wonder why the paradox that many Muslims drink despite their religion's ban on alcohol has not excited the curiosity of researchers more than it has.[8]

Focusing on Iran, the answer to this question, and the more general one concerning the dearth of scholarship on all psychoactive substances, will have to take into account the idealist tradition in the country's history, which is arguably as strong as if not stronger than in the case of Arab lands and the Ottoman Empire. The gravitational force of a culture that has tended to value and validate transcendence and essence over palpable, outer reality, has caused scholars of Iran, Iranians and Westerns alike, to privilege the study of the loftier, more spiritual pursuits of human existence over their interest in life's material aspects, including matters of production and consumption.[9] Add to that the richness of Iran's cultural tradition and the relative poverty of socio-economic documentation for any period prior to the modern age, and one begins to understand why the intoxicating effect of drug taking has agitated scholars mostly as a poetic metaphor.

By sending contradictory signals, the current intellectual climate in the West has been only partially helpful in remedying this situation. Recent trends in scholarship—a broadening of research topics, including socio-economic ones, and a turn to innovative cultural approaches—hold great promise for the field of Middle Eastern studies. Yet, as new vistas have opened up, historians also have faced the anxiety of being branded as "Orientalists," scholars who confuse the study of texts or, worse, texts written by nonnatives, with the study of reality and who use those texts to portray the East as a land of capricious rulers and static societies.

Highlighting alcoholism in court circles and widespread drug use throughout society might not seem the best way to subvert this latter

[6]Tuchscherer, ed., *Le commerce du café*

[7]Heine, *Weinstudien*; Kueny, *Rhetoric of Sobriety*. See also Malecka, "The Muslim Bon Vivant." For a study on wine in Persian poetry, see Epinette, "Le thème du vin."

[8]David M. Fahey, "'I'll Drink to That," 643.

[9]An exception is the ample attention paid to drugs in Ravandi, *Tarikh-i ijtima`i-yi Iran*, 7:225-99. For tobacco, also see Floor, "The Art of Smoking." Matthee, "Coffee in Safavid Iran," is mostly incorporated into the present study.

image. It is indeed easier to ignore the voluminous firsthand literature on the topic, because it does not readily fit the image of an energetic society poised for modernity, and to argue, by way of justification, that much of this literature was written by uninformed foreign observers. I have chosen not to do so, in part because ignoring the topic evidently does not make it disappear, and in part because I believe that indigenous sources are as "tainted" for being biased as foreign ones—although for different reasons—and that there is therefore no inherent reason to privilege domestic voices over external ones. Indigenous sources may appear as more authentic to the society that produced them, but they also tend to present and represent a particular, elitist, selective version of reality, aside from yielding little information on issues of socioeconomic import. Proximity and intimate familiarity do not necessarily trump the reflective detachment of the eyewitness account by outsiders, especially not if the latter record their impressions and observations without a denigrating or overly moralizing tone, as those visiting Iran prior to the nineteenth century often did.[10] Accounts of foreigners can thus find a place in a carefully constructed narrative that goes beyond societal stasis and dissolute elite behavior.

The issue of stasis can be summarily dismissed. Origins and early patterns invariably gave way to development and change. The very introduction and spread of the stimulants that entered Iran during the Safavid period, tobacco, coffee, and tea, signal a vibrant rather than an atrophying society. Not only was Safavid Iran being incorporated into a new global matrix of commerce and consumption; Iranians played an active role in its very formation by enthusiastically embracing the new consumables and adapting them to their needs and tastes.

It is admittedly more difficult to subvert the image of fainéant, drug-addled elites, but here, too, a more nuanced picture might be gained. The apparent contrast between the hard-working, disciplined early modern West and the languid, pleasure-seeking Orient created and nurtured by centuries of image-making and reiteration, has of late been undermined by a steady stream of studies that have burrowed deeply underneath the exterior of Western rationalism and bourgeois frugality to find rich layers of deviant social and sexual behavior. When dealing with early modern Middle Eastern society, there is no need to follow the tendency of this scholarship to hail such behavior for being subversive

[10]This is not to say that these sources are all equal or that the information of even someone like Chardin did not fit into the framework of a seventeenth-century European perspective in which writing about Safavid society and religion was as much about Iran as about the court of the French king or one's position on Catholicism. For such ulterior motives among French travelers to the Middle East and particularly Iran in the seventeenth century, see Carnoy, *Représentations de l'Islam*.

of the prevailing (and oppressive) moral order. To level the playing field, it might be rather more useful neither to follow the "traditional" approach nor to adopt the "new" approach—that is, neither to condemn nor to celebrate and romanticize similar behavior—both of which easily reinforce received notions by identifying drugs with Iranians and their entire culture. To avoid "essentialism" it seems more productive to follow a more functionalist approach by investigating the specific circumstances under which these substances came to play a role in society and how that role changed as circumstances changed.

Specificity, in turn, can be tested and, if need be, challenged through comparison. Tracing Iran's history to the pre-Islamic period takes the burden off Islam as the sole organizing principle of the country's culture and society. Synchronic comparisons, moreover, reveal that in some ways Iran was unique, in others operated in a regional world with which it shared an Islamic cultural idiom, and in yet other ways must be seen as an early modern society that was not that different from faraway countries of a different cultural disposition.[11] It is important to remember in this context that, even as attitudes toward narcotics and stimulants have changed and continue to evolve, as Davenport-Hines says, "absolute sobriety is not a natural or primary human state."[12] Their use is of all time and each society uses its own, but the consumption of legal and illegal substances may be greater in modern times and in the Western world than at any time and in any past society.

*The Pursuit of Pleasure*, then, seeks to join the literature on Europe with a panoramic, yet detailed study of stimulants that keep you awake, that help improve one's concentration—tobacco, coffee, and tea—and the inebriants, narcotics and hallucinogens that have a mellowing effect—wine, opium, and hashish—in early modern Iranian history along the lines of what scholars such as Schivelbusch and Courtwright have achieved for these consumables in the Western or a larger global context. Its aim is to inspire a wider examination of patterns of consumption and consumerism—consumption on a high level and on the

[11]The tem "early modern" requires some clarification in this context. Following Jack Goldstone's recent observations, I use the term as temporal shorthand for the period 1500 to 1850, or rather 1500 to 1900, without the implication that this period marks Iran's transition to modernity and that the Western example is a useful template for studying it. Despite strong reformist impulses and a number of actual reforms throughout the nineteenth century, the country until the Constitutional Revolution (1906–11) remained largely premodern in its economic structure, its mode of governance, and in general in the relationship between rulers and subjects. The one distinct feature that Iran shared with many other countries in this period is its incorporation into a global network of commercial exchange. See Goldstone, "The Problem of the 'Early Modern' World."

[12]Davenport-Hines, *The Pursuit of Oblivion*, ix.

basis of particular scales of values—in Middle Eastern history.[13] It looks at these *Genussmittel* (lit. means of enjoyment), to use the evocative German term, with an eye to their material manifestation—their pharmacological properties and the accessories associated with their use—but, more important, views them as a prism refracting a variety of economic, social, and political issues. Drugs and stimulants will be discussed in their commercial context, paying attention to patterns of importation and distribution, but the study's larger objective is to offer a social history of ways in which Iranians have approached drugs and stimulants since 1500, adapting them to their cultural environment or adapting their cultural environment to them. It explores the circumstances under which wine and opium were transmitted from earlier times or, in the case of tobacco, coffee, and tea, newly introduced and disseminated, how they became integrated into people's lives, why people used them, which social groups were most affected by them, how they fashioned new patterns of recreation and sociability, and how, finally, they figured in the ongoing process of negotiation between institutions of authority—the state and the religious establishment—and society.

The book pays particular attention to a few specific questions and themes. The first concerns origins, antecedents, and (outside) influence. A distinction needs to be made here between, on the one hand, opium and especially wine, both psychoactive agents that had been part of Iranian society since ancient times, and the "new" stimulants, coffee, tobacco, and tea, on the other, which were introduced and gained popularity only some four hundred years ago. The use of the former goes back to pre-Islamic times, and even after the Arab invasion much of the merriment surrounding Iranian court life can be traced to inherited, non-Islamic cultural traditions. Banquets attended by rulers engaged in ceremonial drinking and enlivened by music-making and homoerotic dancing betray the influence of pre-Islamic Iranian beliefs and practices, in which the rite of drinking wine—a symbol for liquid gold and flowing fire—substituted for the even more ancient blood libation, and an ambience in which catamites abounded. Safavid society sanctioned the excessive drinking of its rulers with a widespread belief that, as the son of the Shi`i Imam, the shah was exempt from the ban on drinking alcohol. As was true in many part of the world, opiates served as the only effective painkiller as well as a cure-all for a whole array of ailments and diseases, whereas various opium-laced electuaries were a favorite means for the elite to prolong and enhance sexual performance.

Other non-Islamic, external forces were at work as well. Beginning in the eleventh century C.E. an infusion of Central Asian Turco-Mongol

[13]Adshead, *Material Culure in Europe and China,* 24.

traditions and customs involving excessive drinking and "loose" morals only reinforced such practices. Both traditions resisted the separation of the "clean" from the "dirty" encouraged by the "civilizing process" of normative Islam. The result was a society rich in paradox and ambiguity, led by a royal court legitimized in Islamic terms yet engaged in sexual revelry, the habitual use of opium, and heavy drinking.

In the sixteenth century, wine and opium were joined by tobacco and coffee, both stimulants that entered Iran as part of the so-called Commercial Revolution—the massive movement of goods and people around the globe that started with the European maritime explorations. As was the case in Europe, Iranians initially appreciated these products as medicinal agents, but they soon became very popular as stimulants consumed in an ambience of leisurely sociability. Tobacco conquered the country and both sexes within decades after its introduction. First adopted in Sufi circles, coffee took longer to find a wider consumer base and only became a common beverage with the introduction of the urban coffeehouse at the turn of the seventeenth century. Tea had long been known in Iran through overland contacts with China, but it, too, came to be accepted as more than a remedy for ailments following the sixteenth-century worldwide expansion of trade.

Modern scholars, enthralled or perhaps distracted by the forces of globalization and the attendant loss of visibility of productive forces in the Western world, have shown a growing fascination with consumption as an end in itself.[14] This book makes a conscious attempt to link consumption to the dynamics of production and distribution, in the belief that a narrow focus on consumption at the expense of a careful consideration of underlying demand *and* supply factors severely distorts reality. A simple diffusionist model rarely accounts for the complexity of the spread of food and drink. In most parts of the world the popularity of coffee, tea, and tobacco was not simply the outcome of availability following Europe's exploration of the seas but, rather, of a complex interplay between supply and demand factors. The lifting of logistical obstacles is surely a precondition for dissemination beyond a tiny elite, but as the popularization of coffee in Europe demonstrates—after the initial introduction by immigrant laborers it took almost a hundred years for the drink to become a commercial success—not a sufficient one.[15] Iran was no different. Matters of geography as much as issues of class and status having to do with outside influence determined the country's

[14]Agnew, "Coming Up for Air."

[15]For this argument, made in the case of the consumption of coffee in early modern England, see Smith, "Early Diffusion of Coffee Drinking in England."

eventual preference for tea over coffee. It remains a mystery why the water pipe became the smoking vehicle *par excellence* in Iran and throughout the Middle East, although not in Europe, but one clue might be an "elective affinity" between the age-old usage of hashish and that of newly introduced tobacco.

This study develops two other lines of thought. One of these concerns the discrepancy between the idealized version of life as rhetorically envisioned by the ulama, and life as lived practice, messy, defiant of precise boundaries, resistant to control and discipline. The paradox is addressed here in reference to Safavid Iran, a religiously inspired state that paired piety with prostitution and drug use.

Safavid Iran (1501–1722) began as a tribal formation harking back to Central Asian nomadic models and ended as a sedentary agrarian-based polity centering on an elaborate, mostly nontribal bureaucracy. Shi`ism, its official religion, at first manifested itself as a heterodox and extremist populist creed but in time followed the imperatives of the state by becoming mainstream and scripturalist. The importance and influence of its spokesmen, the Shi`i ulama, grew accordingly. Initially operating on the margins of a tribal society and its semipagan beliefs, the religious leaders soon entered the ranks of the elite through intermarriage and bureaucratic appointment. This newly found status enabled them to put their imprimatur on the state and its ways. One way of doing this was to enjoin believers to lead a life of moral probity and to call on the state to enforce Islamic codes of behavior. The results are seen in periodic restrictions and bans on the movement and activities of non-Muslims, and on state-led attempts to convert unbelievers—Jews and Armenians—to Islam. Their activism included calls for the banishment of conduct and consumption that was deemed un-Islamic—prostitution, drinking, and, in some cases, the consumption of coffee and tobacco, both newly introduced stimulants that generated debate and controversy and that contributed to the emergence of new forms of public life. The ascendance of the clerical estate culminated in the late seventeenth century with the accession of Shah Sultan Husayn (r. 1694–1722) and the incumbency of Muhammad Baqir Majlisi as *shaykh al-islam* of Isfahan, the highest clerical authority of the realm. Pious and weak-willed, the shah reigned under the spell of Majlisi, and, in deference to the latter's uncompromising brand of Shi`i Islam, at the outset of his reign outlawed wine, prostitution, and gambling.

The historical implications of this narrative might seem clear: To the casual observer it is but a short step from (late) Safavid Iran to the Islamic Republic, from Majlisi to Khomeini. Late Safavid Iran indeed seems to prefigure today's Iran in its stern application of Islamic law and

the observation of a puritanical morality, at least in the popular imagination of the West.

This book challenges the above image of early modern Iran as a harbinger of the current Islamic Republic. It does not dispute the trajectory of the Safavid state from a steppe polity to a bureaucratic state with ideological underpinnings that became more and more aligned with the tenets of doctrinaire Shi`ism. It does, however, take issue with the notion that, in the process, Safavid society increasingly came to reflect the ideal preached by the zealous; that the clerical estate successfully made everyone conform to the letter of the Islamic holy law. Gender segregation in Safavid Iran was strictly enforced, to the point where the call to prayer was not ordinarily done from the top of a minaret for fear that the muezzin might see women in their enclosed gardens. Yet visitors noted the presence in the capital alone of some ten thousand prostitutes who openly plied their trade.[16] Although the state periodically heeded Islamic strictures, its legal codes were borne out of conflict and challenge and the measures it enacted were often symbolic and rhetorical rather than practical in nature. Their effect was invariably temporary at best. Prostitution continued to thrive. Clerical suspicions of coffee and tobacco did not prevent Iranians from enthusiastically embracing these novelties. The use of opium was widespread, binge drinking remained common among the elite, and even some religious officials liked to imbibe. Royal banquets and receptions habitually included performances by female dancers and young male singers and jugglers, and numerous courtesans were attached to the households of top government officials. Safavid Iran, in sum, reveals itself as a society that mixed the sacred and the profane, where pleasure and proscription were not mutually exclusive, and in which long-standing habits—and economic imperatives—usually won out over moral considerations.

*The Pursuit of Pleasure* seeks to explain such discrepancies between discourse and practice, between rhetorical virtue and public "vice," as deriving from a complex historical tradition of which formal religion is only one aspect. First, a state that itself heavily engaged in riotous living could do little more than engage in periodic incantations to bridge the gap between normative and actual behavior. Second, although the state derived its legitimacy from religion, always paid lip service to its tenets, and, as said, occasionally heeded its counsel, it was essentially secular in its makeup and will to power. It also was nothing if not pragmatic. Its pragmatism grew out of an accommodationist instinct, a need to engage in "tacit bargaining" with society and its irrepressible urges, but derived

[16]For this, see Matthee, "Prostitutes, Courtesans, and Dancing Girls."

above all from the dilemma that has confronted governments through the ages: the need to choose between principles and profit.[17] As everywhere else, morality in early modern Iran generally foundered on the imperatives of revenue collection, so that Safavid authorities connived at prostitution and smoking in large part because of the tax income these activities generated.

The religious leaders had a role in this as well, but it was not simply that of an oppositional force keen to remind the community of God's commands. Such a picture would be altogether too simplistic, and not just because the ulama failed to bend society to their will. Their ability to curb illicit behavior was limited, to be sure. They faced a recalcitrant society and a state with limited power that was mostly concerned about enforcement to the extent that it served its own interests. But far from being a negative force, vainly exhorting the state to enforce proper religious conduct, the religious authorities had a productive role insofar as they had a stake in the decadence they decried. The existence of bad behavior justified and legitimized their existence and their status in society. By defining themselves against vice, they became vested in it. Inasmuch they all too often engaged in illicit activities themselves, they perpetuated vice by choosing to ignore it or to channel it into acceptable categories. They continued to enjoin the state to live up to its duty of upholding public morality. But because executive power belonged to the state, they were resigned to sporadic enforcement that rarely matched pious intentions. What appears, on the surface, as a dichotomy between norm and reality, on a deeper level turns out to be a dialectic process in which both reproduced each other in an unending creative tension between hedonism and puritanism.

The third and last theme concerns historical continuity and change. Safavid Iran began and ended as a polity in which religion and state were entwined, but the nature of their relationship evolved in accordance with the transformation of society itself from a tribally based disposition centered on a messianic leader to a quasi-bureaucratic, patrimonial enterprise led by a palace-bound shah. The trajectory of wine illustrates this best. Although the tensions inherent in wine were never

[17] For the term "tacit bargaining," see Dale Eickleman, "Foreword: The Religious Public Sphere in Early Muslim Societies," in Hoexter et al., eds., *The Public Sphere in Muslim Societies,* 6.

To what tangled knots of complication and contradiction the dilemma of proscription versus profitability can lead is still vividly illustrated in modern Japan. There tobacco revenue "bankrolls the state" in that it is the largest single moneymaker for the government, so that antismoking measures proposed by the health ministry run up against opposition by the ministry of finance. See Stephanie Strom, "Japan and Tobacco Revenue: Leader Faces Difficult Choice," *New York Times* June 13 (2001), A1, 14.

solved, its place in society changed considerably in the course of the Safavid period. Where Shah Isma`il's orgies had been flamboyant, theatrically visible affairs, Shah Tahmasb repented for his own youthful extravagance by issuing an edict against this and other forms of "sinful and frivolous" behavior. Most subsequent shahs drank and some drank heavily, but they typically wavered between guilt-ridden indulgence and abstention. Wine lost its sacral character to become a profane drink consumed in private, reflecting the evolution of Iranian society from a tribal polity predicated on openness and access to a sedentary state in which the ruler all but absconded into the confines of his palace.

Change naturally did not stop with the demise of the Safavids. The dramatic fall of Isfahan in 1722, although it effectively ended Safavid rule and ushered in a period of turmoil and destitution with significant repercussions for commerce and consumption, did not constitute a decisive break in Iranian history. The Qajar period, 1796–1925, neither picked up Iran's history seamlessly following the chaotic eighteenth century, nor did it represent something radically novel. Iran remained a preindustrial society. Many social practices endured until the late nineteenth century, and in some cases well into more recent times, but some things began to change. For one, beginning with Fath `Ali Shah (r. 1797–1834), Qajar rulers, concerned about their religious credentials, no longer indulged in the type of orgiastic drinking rituals known from the Safavid period. The justification of drinkers changed as well. Whereas in Safavid times those who drank seem to have done so either unselfconsciously or plagued by a guilty conscience, the Qajar period saw the appearance of drinking as a statement, as an act of defiance, as a way to flaunt one's libertinism, to show one's disdain for the clergy and its religious law, in a gesture reminiscent of the Sufis of yesteryear, although largely devoid of alternative religious pretensions.

Under Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848–96) the Qajar state also took a series of measures against stimulants and the venues where they were consumed. Recognizing the harmful effect of the rapid spread of opium smoking—as opposed to the traditional eating—at the time, the authorities sought to curb the practice. They also temporarily closed coffeehouses as centers of political agitation and opposition. The impulse behind such measures, moral and political concerns, recalls Safavid times. Yet, religious motives played virtually no role in Qajar intervention and interdiction, not even at the rhetorical level. The real contrast with the Safavid state lies in different challenges facing the state: the concerns of late Qajar rulers were no longer those of those of a premodern loose and latudinarian polity pressured by religious conservatism but those of a centralizing and modernizing state buffeted by political and economic forces beyond its control.

## Organization

The book follows a thematic approach within a chronological sequence in the presentation of its material. Its opening chapter offers a broad overview of Iran's political, social, and economic history between 1500 and 1900, providing the nonspecialized reader with a background to the themes developed later on. What follows is divided into two parts, one covering the period between 1500 and 1800, the era of Safavid rule and its immediate aftermath, the other the nineteenth century, the Qajar period. Part I contains four chapters and discusses as many stimulants, one per chapter. Part II reexamines each of these, in addition to tea, in a different historical context.

Part I opens with two chapters that explore the Safavid contribution to Iran's rich history of alcohol and, more specifically, wine, the oldest and most ambiguous of the stimulants under consideration. Chapter 2 examines consumption, focusing on the elite, which by all accounts were the only ones who drank, and especially the role of drinking in the changing nature of kingship. Chapter 3 concentrates on the unease alcohol consumption generated in a Muslim environment and explores the causes and circumstances of the bans that were periodically issued against it.

Chapter 4 looks into the history of opium and hashish in Safavid times. Unlike alcohol, opium and cannabis did not carry a religious stigma in premodern Iran; indeed, both qualified as legitimate substitutes for wine. Long eaten rather than smoked, opium especially was well integrated into society, so well in fact that French observers of Safavid society likened its use to that of wine in their home country, arguing that Iranians knew how to deal with it and generally did not succumb to its addictive qualities.

Tobacco, to be considered in chapter 5, switches the focus to the "new" stimulants, the ones that were introduced as part of the commercial revolution. Next to tea, it is probably the most powerful of the stimulants in terms of its cultural adaptability, of its "capacity to acquire meaning beyond its pharmacological properties."[18] This chapter will first investigate the circumstances of tobacco's introduction and popularization, and then turn its attention to the controversy it raised in religious and medical circles.

Chapter 6 examines coffee in the Safavid period. As an import product, the trade in coffee is relatively well documented, and commerce therefore dominates the first part of the chapter. Turning to consumption, the second part discusses coffee's evolution from a medicinal agent to a

[18]Gladwell, "Java Man," 76.

recreational beverage, but the focus will be on the coffeehouse as the venue where the various pastimes and practices associated with it became the object of political and religious concern.

Part II of the book explores patterns of continuity and transformation in the period following the rise of the Qajar dynasty at the turn of the nineteenth century, with an eye to changes undergone by the various drugs and stimulants and the venues where they were consumed. Its four chapters are concerned as well with social and political developments in nineteenth-century Iranian society, and especially with its fitful trajectory toward modernization and the policies this entailed.

The first of these, chapter 7, charts the evolution of wine beyond Safavid times and investigates the role of drinking in the continuing evolution of Iranian society from a hard-drinking steppe polity predicated on openness and access, to a sedentary state in which the court reached out for different symbols of legitimacy.

The process of change receives further attention in chapter 8, which documents the evolution of opium and tobacco from popular consumables to substances of national import. When the more invasive habit of smoking rather than ingesting it gained ground in the late nineteenth century, opium lost it relatively unproblematic place in society to become a source of widespread addiction and an array of social ills. It turned into not simply a cash crop but into the country's principal cash crop and in some regions a virtual monoculture, exposing Iran to famine. Tobacco resembled opium in turning into one of the country's most lucrative export items, but political events caused it to follow a different trajectory. The enormous popularity of smoking had long rendered the clerical debate about tobacco's permissibility moot. When the state resolved to hand the production, sale, and distribution of tobacco to foreign interests, the ulama intervened, mobilizing smokers to reject the outside forces that had sullied the nation by acquiring control over it.

Chapter 9 will turn to coffee and tea in the period from the early eighteenth century to the "triumph" of tea in the late nineteenth century. It first discusses the relative popularity of the two drinks in Safavid times and the reasons for the virtual disappearance of coffeehouses in the tumultuous period following the fall of Isfahan in 1722. The chapter then traces the shift in taste from coffee to tea as the favorite beverage of the Iranian people, exploring the role of tea-drinking Russia and England and social circumstances having to do with class and taste that made this transformation possible.

Chapter 10, finally, examines the phenomenon that accompanied the breakthrough of tea, the emergence of the "new" coffeehouse in the second half of the late nineteenth century, which was similar to the traditional *qahvah-khanah* even though it now served tea rather than

coffee. This chapter considers the physical shape of these reconstituted establishments as well as their function and their clientele. Its real focus is on the concerns and anxieties they generated, prompting the government at various times to interfere in their operation. These anxieties ranged from a preoccupation with the nation's balance of trade to fears of social unrest, thus representing long-standing Iranian sensibilities.